



Commandant's Note

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ONE INFANTRY—NOW MORE THAN EVER

There is but one Infantry! The debate surrounding the different types of infantry units has polarized us. It threatens to further divide our branch family at a time when we should be focusing our efforts on the bigger issue of structuring and training to meet the challenges of this century.

The Ranger, airborne, light, air assault, and mechanized elements of our branch all possess unique characteristics dictated by mission requirements, but the purpose of the Infantry (with a capital "I") is still "to close with the enemy by fire and movement to destroy or capture him, or to repel his attack by fire, close combat, and counterattack." Getting to the battlefield is an implied task, and how we get there—by parachute, wheeled or tracked vehicle, on foot or helicopter, or in a Bradley—does not change the fact that we are, and must remain, one Infantry, capable of executing the close-in fight as we have throughout our history. We must keep this in mind even as we examine the structure and missions of the Initial Brigade Combat Team.

Fort Benning recently hosted a conference of former Infantry School Commandants, in which we drew upon their 31 years of experience during discussions of issues affecting our branch. The Commandants unanimously sup-

ported the One Infantry concept, and overwhelmingly concurred with the concept of the Initial Brigade Combat Team. We agreed that we could best achieve a better sense of unity and common purpose within Career Management Field 11 by combining military occupational specialties (MOSSs) 11B and 11M, first at Skill Level 1 and eventually at the junior leader level of Skill Level 2 until BNCOC attendance. We are considering including 11H in the future. We see no change at present for MOS 11C because of the unique mission and the technical skills demanded of indirect fire crewmen.

Division and corps commanders were asked to comment on this proposed merger and all but one supported combining at Skill Level 1. Two recommended we take a closer look before extending this to Skill level 2. This has certainly not been finalized yet, and we are prepared to make adjustments as we gain more experience. We value input from the field as we weigh our options on this initiative, so please tell us what you think.

If we are to continue to man the infantry force we need, we must examine ways to increase accessions and reduce the attrition rate among first-term enlistees. The "Buddy Team" concept is one measure that will help

us achieve this goal. We will test this concept for the Army this summer with 1,200 MOS 11M soldiers in 600 two-man teams. The soldiers chosen will be paired up at Fort Benning and will complete one-station unit training (OSUT) together. They will PCS to their first unit and will be assigned to the same company—as a minimum. The goal is to get them in the same squad! In the past, we have relied upon unit/station of choice enlistment options and other incentives to attract soldiers. Now we are taking this one step further by matching each initial entry soldier with a “Buddy” during OSUT. In the event one soldier of the team is unable to complete OSUT, the remaining soldier will be paired with another projected for the same follow-on assignment. This will strengthen the infantry force in several ways: It will increase the number of new enlistments; it will enhance assimilation into the unit in a way our sponsorship programs could not; it will improve unit cohesion; and it will reduce the attrition rate among first-term soldiers. If initial results are successful, all OSUTs will convert to the “Buddy Team” concept.

The Infantry has always taken tremendous pride in the fact that it gets the tough missions. For 225 years it has ensured our freedom while restoring the liberties of others around the world. We have done what was demanded of us, and have been able to speak with one voice on matters that affect our branch. It can be no other way. While technological advances have enabled us to sharpen the specialized capabilities within the types of infan-

try, the mission of the Infantry itself must remain the top consideration in discussions of where the branch is headed. And let us not forget—Hi-Tech advantages aside—the rate of movement of dismounted infantrymen today is essentially the same as it was during the U.S. Civil War. This means that once we dismount, it's a foot soldiers' fight and we must train and retain the best foot soldiers on the battlefield.

As we prepare for the challenges of this century, we must stay focused on the basics. No degree of specialization can replace the soldier who is firmly rooted in the fundamentals of his profession. We need to foster and maintain soldiers' confidence in their leaders, develop the expertise and training at small-unit level to sustain them, and ensure that the infantry squad is manned and resourced at the levels it needs to fight and win. The nine-man infantry squad is absolutely critical to the accomplishment of the Infantry's mission. While some advocate a smaller squad, it is simply not enough in combat. Smaller squads lack adequate firepower and are not robust enough to sustain the casualties of the close-in fight and still accomplish the mission.

These, then, are the challenges we must overcome if the Infantry is to remain the key element of the combined arms team. We must think in terms of one Infantry, speak with one voice, and settle for nothing less than the nine-man infantry squad. When we accomplish this, we can again focus our full attention on the training, sustainment, and survivability issues that will spell success for the Infantry on tomorrow's battlefields.

